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UNCLAS HALIFAX 000164

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CAN

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SUBJECT: FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN: LIBERALS MAINTAIN SUPPORT IN ATLANTIC CANADA

REF: HALIFAX 0159 AND PREVIOUS

1. In our meetings this past week with election-watchers, pollsters, party officials and candidates themselves, the consensus still appears to be that the Liberals will maintain the majority of the 32 seats in Atlantic Canada in the June 28 federal election (reftel). With just a few days left in the campaign our contacts are standing by their original predictions that the Liberals will continue to take advantage of the general trepidation towards Conservative leader Stephen Harper and the reluctance of the electorate to move towards the third-place New Democratic Party. Although Conservative candidates have had some success in assuaging the fears that Atlantic Canadians have over how Mr. Harper views economic development issues in the Atlantic region, voters are not ready to abandon the Liberals entirely. Consequently, and in spite of what our contacts believe has been a poor campaign by the Liberals, the Liberals will still prevail on election day. One of our contacts summed up the campaign by saying that Atlantic Canadians will simply be asking themselves, "Who can I trust, or who can I least distrust?"

2. Comment: With their apparent agreement on who is going to capture the 32 seats here, the focus has now drifted to the national stage. Like their counterparts across the country, each is coming up with a variety of scenarios for what will happen in the event of a widely anticipated minority government situation. While they have somewhat different views on what party can form alliances with whom, the one point they do have in common is that the country could very well be headed to the polls in the next year, year-and-half time frame. End Comment

ROWLAND